

## Shofetim Devarim - Deuteronomy (16.18-21.9)

Moses is giving his very last speech to the Hebrews before they cross the Jordan River and for the first time enter God's promised land of Canaan. Moses said to the people, "Appoint judges for all your tribes in all your settlements. Do not let judgment be bent by recognizing a face or accepting a bribe, because both blind the eyes of the wise and cause the words of the righteous to falter. Justice, justice shall you pursue, so that you may live and take possession of the land which God, your God, is giving you.

Do not plant sacred trees or build sacred pillars, for God your God hates them. Now if you think a man or women in your settlements is doing evil in the eyes of God by worshipping the sun and moon and stars, ask questions until you find the truth and have two or three witnesses who verify it is as true. If it is, you must rid yourself of any evildoers, including idolaters and those who do not listen to the judges or the Levite priests.

When you settle the land God is giving you, you will want a king and God will choose a king from among you. This king must not be too rich nor live too fancy for his heart might go astray. Instead when this king sits on the throne, he shall write for himself a copy of this Teaching in another book. He shall read from it as long as he shall live so that he may learn to fear God and not lift himself above others.

Remember the tribe of Levi, for they did not inherit land. Instead they are given the honor of the priesthood and the responsibility for taking care of God's Sanctuary. This is the law: The Levites should receive from you the first reaping of all your crops, wines, oils and meats and the offerings throughout the year.

In this new land, do not learning the revolting practices of the nations there like witchcraft, and using psychics or astrologers to predict the future. Stay faithful to your God. Beware of false prophets for only those prophets whom God sends, speak what comes true.

In the land, separate three cities as places of refuge so that those awaiting trial and those who have accidentally hurt someone will be safe from those wanting revenge. Remember, all judicial cases must be established with two or three witnesses. If there is a corrupt witness who lies in their testimony, they shall be put to death. When others hear this consequence, they will fear it and not do such evil. Do not have pity with evildoers. It must be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

When you go to battle, do not fear, for God is with you. Do not send to war any newlyweds or new homeowners. Always offer peace first. If accepted, they are to be your servants. If it comes to war, destroy them so there is no trace of their evil ways, but never hurt their fruit trees.

**Questions:** 1. Why is being fair is so important? When were you fair to another person. 2) How do consequences help you from doing bad things? 3) Why is copying the Torah going to help Israelite kings rule? **Illustration Ideas:** a witness...judge.. the King...offering peace...fruit trees